

POLAR BEAR RANGE STATES' MEETING

National Conservation Training Center, Shepherdstown, West Virginia, U.S.A.
26-28 June 2007

Summary record of the fourth plenary session of the meeting

Afternoon of 27 June 2007

Chairman: Kenneth Stansell
Rapporteurs: Donna Brewer
Anne St. John

The Chairman announced that he had received a number of requests for a group photograph of the meeting participants. He proposed to the delegates to take a group photograph immediately prior to the start of the Plenary session tomorrow morning. There was agreement with this suggestion. He also noted that the group needed to wrap up the language on subsistence hunting, and he would come back to that issue tomorrow morning.

Bear-Human interactions – Village Safety Issues (continued)

Russia continued its intervention on village safety issues. They noted that they had recently completed a draft report, in collaboration with the Nanuk Commission, which provides information from interviews conducted in 20 villages in Chukotka. The report contains a collection of information on legends, tales and spiritual aspects of polar bears and the peoples living among them. Through the interviews, researchers were able to identify key reproductive and denning areas, and seasonal migration routes and feeding areas. Although the information gathered from the interviews is traditional knowledge, it has provided the basis for carrying out more in depth scientific research.

Canada recognized that this issue presents challenges, and they proposed the following four points:

1. Deterrent programs should be recognized as being important;
2. Kills made in defense must be accounted for within a sustainable harvest system;
3. A person who kills a polar bear in defense should not personally benefit from the kill, and proceeds (meat and hides) should go to the community; and
4. All illegal kills should be prosecuted.

The Chairman summarized that village safety issues are extremely important and added that exchange of information on best practices should be encouraged. He asked if there were any reactions to the points made by Canada.

Greenland stated that they have human-bear encounters and conflicts, but the occurrence of interactions in Greenland is not as frequent as in Canada and Russia. They also noted that polar bear observations near settlements are increasing, and Greenland is working on developing procedures to handle bear-human encounters. Regarding the four points from Canada, Greenland noted the need for additional internal discussions on whether kills made in defense should be part of the harvest quota. They agreed in principle with the other three points made by Canada.

The United States agreed that the four points identified by Canada were important. They also agreed with Greenland that the inclusion of defense kills in a quota should be discussed further. The United States stressed the need to share best practices among range States and described the current polar bear deterrent program in place in the North Slope Borough, adding that informational brochures on bear-human interactions are provided to all tourists and new residents. They agreed that collaboration on educational programs and outreach efforts would be useful.

Russia agreed that Canada's four points are important, and agreed that the issue of whether bears killed in self-defense should be included in the take quota would need to be discussed further. They noted that the same kind of discussion should occur for bears taken for scientific research. They suggested creating a working group to share knowledge from native peoples and to discuss ways to distribute such information.

The Chairman summarized that there appeared to be agreement on three of the four points made by Canada but that there was a need for additional dialogue on the consideration of defense kills as part of a sustainable harvest. He also noted that Russia had proposed the establishment of an inter-governmental working group to share best practices in traditional information and asked if there was general support for the working group. Greenland suggested waiting until tomorrow to determine the need for establishing working groups, and this suggestion was agreed to by the group.

Bear-Human interactions – Habitat protection measures

Norway provided introductory remarks, which included a summary of the challenges and opportunities for protected areas and marine area management, and recommended possible steps forward. They noted the following specific challenges and opportunities in addressing the gaps in polar bear protection:

1. The recommendation of the PBSG to create protected areas throughout polar bear range to conserve key polar bear habitats, with particular focus on terrestrial summer retreat habitats;
2. The suggestion from the World Wildlife Fund to this group to look at protecting onshore habitat used by polar bears for migration routes, foraging and denning; and
3. Work done by the Conservation of Arctic Flora and Fauna (CAFF) Program under the Arctic Council on protected areas, including overviews for the Circumpolar Protected Areas Network (CPAN).

They also noted two projects under development by the Arctic Council related to changing sea ice conditions that could be useful to the work of this body:

1. A project on adaptation to climate change in the Arctic, which will identify areas where adaptation is needed and consider possible actions. Although this project will provide a general framework, Norway noted that it would have to be looked at more closely with respect to polar bears; and
2. A scientific project on changing ice conditions in the Arctic, beginning with looking at sea ice and hopefully continuing by looking at the Greenland ice.

They concluded their introduction by offering six recommendations for range States to consider:

1. Emphasize the importance of Article II of the 1973 *Agreement on the Conservation of Polar Bears*;
2. Welcome the efforts already undertaken by range States on habitat protection;
3. Encourage continued bilateral cooperation on protected areas related to shared populations;
4. Cooperate to identify critical terrestrial and marine areas that should be considered by range States for formal protection measures;
5. Share experiences on the management of key marine habitats, including the ice edge/marginal ice zone; and
6. Identify management responses related to changing sea ice conditions, including the location and management of protected areas.

The United States noted that they have a number of protected areas in Alaska that include polar bear habitat. They also noted that they use aircraft in the polar bear habitat west of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge to identify denning sites and then work with industry to avoid disturbing those areas.

Russia noted that they have an established network of protected areas and have plans to extend this network. They stated that they will pay special attention to shipping and gas and oil production in the southeastern Barents Sea and noted that it was particularly important to establish protections in industrial areas. They emphasized that it is important to protect the entire ecosystem to safeguard the polar bear.

Canada remarked that they would cooperate to identify areas for consideration for formal protection. However, they suggested that the language in Norway's fourth bullet be modified to acknowledge social and economic concerns and focus on land use planning rather than simply identifying new areas for protection.

Greenland noted that two Executive Orders on protected areas include polar bear conservation measures. They noted that there are some areas that are located outside the areas protected under the Executive Orders, which could experience increased disturbance by marine traffic, especially if such traffic increases in connection to oil and gas exploration and new opportunities for transport resulting from climate change.

The United States noted that Norway made reference to ongoing activities in three other fora, but stated that it was premature to consider those activities in depth in developing future steps at this meeting.

Norway acknowledged that the interventions by Canada and the United States to work with industry and consider land use planning, respectively, were very useful. They agreed that it would be important to develop careful wording on the recommendation of this group, and they suggested that changes might be required to a couple of the bullet points to incorporate other considerations such as management areas, land use planning, and industry involvement. Canada requested that the revisions take into consideration the application of management measures to marine, coastal, and terrestrial habitats. The Chairman noted that there appeared to be general agreement other than fine-tuning the text in a couple of the bullet points. The delegates unanimously requested to see the text before agreeing to any final recommendations on this item, and they agreed to consider revisions to the text when reviewing the summary report of this session.

Bear-Human interactions – Shipping and tourism

Norway made introductory remarks, generally dividing the topic into two parts: shipping and large vessel traffic, and tourism and small vessel traffic. They noted that the PBSG, at its 2005 meeting, recognized the increased risks to polar bears from intensified ship traffic. They suggested that it might be useful to request that the PBSG undertake a study of the effects and consequences of increased large vessel traffic on polar bears. With regard to tourism and small vessel traffic, they noted that recreation and tourism pose potential threats to polar bears if unregulated. They suggested that the group might wish to develop best practices and possibly even codes of conduct that could be imposed on tourist activities in polar bear areas.

Russia noted that tourism is increasing in polar bear habitat in Russia and there is a need for developing appropriate management measures.

Greenland noted that hunters are generally positive towards tourists, but that polar bear tourism is low in Greenland due to the irregularity of sightings. They also noted that there could be future concern if the sea ice retreats and additional passages open to vessel traffic.

Canada supported Norway's proposal to develop codes of conduct for tourism and noted the need to discuss how to distribute such information.

The United States agreed with the need to be attentive to potential increases in tourism. They noted that, in the United States, there is not a significant issue with polar bear-related tourism, but they supported the idea of discussing codes of conduct.

The Chairman noted that there appeared to be support for developing best practices and codes of conduct; he suggested that the delegates consider development of these recommendations when they review the summary report of this session.

Range States' Research and Monitoring Priorities

Russia gave an introduction to this topic, noting that the PBSG has identified areas for research priority. They suggested that range States should intensify research in the areas of: contaminants and sources of pollutants, the use of genetic techniques to determine population structure, and the

effects of climate change on polar bears and their habitat. They added that future research should pay particular attention to involving traditional communities.

The Chairman added that it would be useful for the group to identify the best application of limited resources.

The United States noted that there are some excellent examples of bilateral research and suggested that the PBSG might be able to assist in sorting through the priorities. They noted the need to build on the bilateral research by 1) broadening the view to address the ice change and establish cooperation across entities using both direct observation and modeling techniques, and 2) moving beyond population and subpopulation estimates by developing population projections.

Norway stressed the need to create incentives for jurisdictions to find secure funding to undertake research. They noted that the PBSG has conducted two circumpolar studies on levels of organochlorine pollutants, that some range States conduct adequate screening programs for new compounds, and that knowledge on the effects of pollutants and their metabolites are still lacking.

Canada noted that the PBSG was very comprehensive in identifying research priorities. They also agreed with the need to develop standardized approaches for monitoring polar bears and stressed the need for consistency and coherency in monitoring efforts.

Greenland agreed in principle but noted that they may be in a different financial situation than other range States with regard to their ability to carry out monitoring. With a human population of 57,000 in a country of more than 2 million square kilometers, financial resources are limited and regular biological monitoring of polar bear populations at present depends on external funding. Therefore, Greenland is exploring whether local-based monitoring methods can be used to supplement conventional monitoring of the country's living resources.

The Chairman asked if there was general support for moving forward in developing a specific list of research priorities and requested guidance on how best to move forward on this issue. Greenland, supported by the United States, suggested that it might be useful to look at the recommendations developed by the PBSG at its 2005 meeting along side the recommendations developed by this meeting. Russia offered to compile a list of the PBSG recommendations for discussion during tomorrow's session.

Canada noted that their highest priority was to determine baseline information for polar bear populations. The United States supported Canada's call to prioritize obtaining information on demographics, vital rates, and population modeling. They added that research on habitat was also a priority since it is changing so rapidly.

The Chairman proposed that during tomorrow's session, the group review the future research needs identified by the PBSG and discuss the way forward on this issue. He ended by noting that there would be a group photograph tomorrow morning at 9h00.